

TALIK: Steel Division-Six

Patton Museum Ceremony Honors Major General Israel Tal (Ret.) Mounted Leader of the Israeli Defence Forces

by Major General Stan R. Sheridan (Retired)

On the 10th of December 1996, the Patton Museum Development Fund-Cavalry/Armor Foundation and the United States Armor Association together held a recognition ceremony in the Patton Museum to honor Major General (Ret.) Israel Tal, the premier living Israeli tanker and mounted force leader of the Israeli Defence Forces.

It was fitting that General Tal be honored at the home of U.S. Armor, within the Patton Museum, a building erected in honor of one of the U.S. Army's greatest leaders, General George S. Patton, Jr., and in an auditorium named for General Creighton W. Abrams, the premier U.S. mounted force leader and visionary of the U.S. Army's recent past. Among the many dignitaries present in the audience were Major General Yoram Yair, Israeli Defense Attache; Major General George H. Harmeyer, CG, USAARMC; General (Ret.) Donn A. Starry, former CG, USA TRADOC and CINC RECDOM; Mr. Hudson Drake, Corporate VP, Teledyne, Inc.; and Mr. Roger Tetrault, President, General Dynamics Land Systems, along with many of General Tal's friends and admirers from both the United States and Israel.

General (Ret.) Donn A. Starry, representing the U.S. Armor Association and accompanied by the artist, Mr. Jody Harmon, presented General Tal with an original portrait, entitled *TALIK*, as General Tal is affectionately known in Israel, depicting him as the Commander of the Steel Division during the Six-Day War. Included with the portrait is the scene of a tank-vs-tank battle typical of actions of the Steel Division. The presentation of the portrait, and the recognition it represents, was the culmination of the efforts of many of General Tal's friends and admirers in the United States, past and present, in and out of uniform, from both the U.S. Army and U.S. industry. Following the presentation of the portrait, the first of 250 prints of the portrait, *TALIK*, was

unveiled on the "COMMANDERS' WALL" in the Patton Museum by the museum's director, Mr. John Purdy. The singular nature of this honor to General Tal rests in the fact that his portrait finds itself in the company of Generals Patton and Rommel as the only other mounted warfare leaders whose portraits are now displayed on the Commanders' Wall. Other portraits by Mr. Harmon, including one of General Abrams, are planned for future display. The remaining numbered prints of *TALIK*, all signed by the artist and some signed by General Tal, will be sold by the Patton Museum in its fund-raising efforts.

General Tal, a native Israeli Sabra, began his military service in the British Army during World War II, rising to the rank of sergeant in the Jewish Brigade. He saw combat in every one of the Arab-Israeli Wars, first as an infantry commander, and later an armor and mounted force commander.

As an armored brigade commander, as an armored division commander in the Six-Day War, as the commander of the Israeli Armour Corps, as the Vice Chief of the General Staff, and as the Commander of the Southern Front, General Tal was a key figure in developing and applying modern armor battle tactics and techniques. In later years, he was the designer, developer, and producer of Israel's world class MERKAVA Main Battle Tank. And if these were not enough for a lifetime of accomplishments and service to his country, he found time to be a confidant and advisor to all of Israel's Prime Ministers from Ben Gurion and Meir in Israel's early days to Rabin, Peres, and Netanyahu in more recent times.

A true measure and spirit of the man that has carried him so successfully through the years, both as a mounted force commander and as one of his country's foremost government leaders, comes from his words to his troops just

before the Six-Day War, and quoted in part:

"Now that the plan is clear to us all, and, with it, all the moves nicely drawn on our maps, — combat never develops quite in accordance with the arrows on the map. However, one thing must be executed exactly as planned: (that is,) the principle and concept lying behind these map markings. All will charge forward to the assault and will penetrate as deeply as possible without paying concern to flanks and the rear. Whoever loses contact with our forces must continue to battle forward, knowing that the rest of his comrades are doing the same. — The one who wins the first battle will harbor the offensive spirit, the one who loses will feel retreat in his soul. Thus the fate of the State is bound up with what we do now, how we act and how we fare. — There will be no halt and no retreat. There will be only assault and advance."

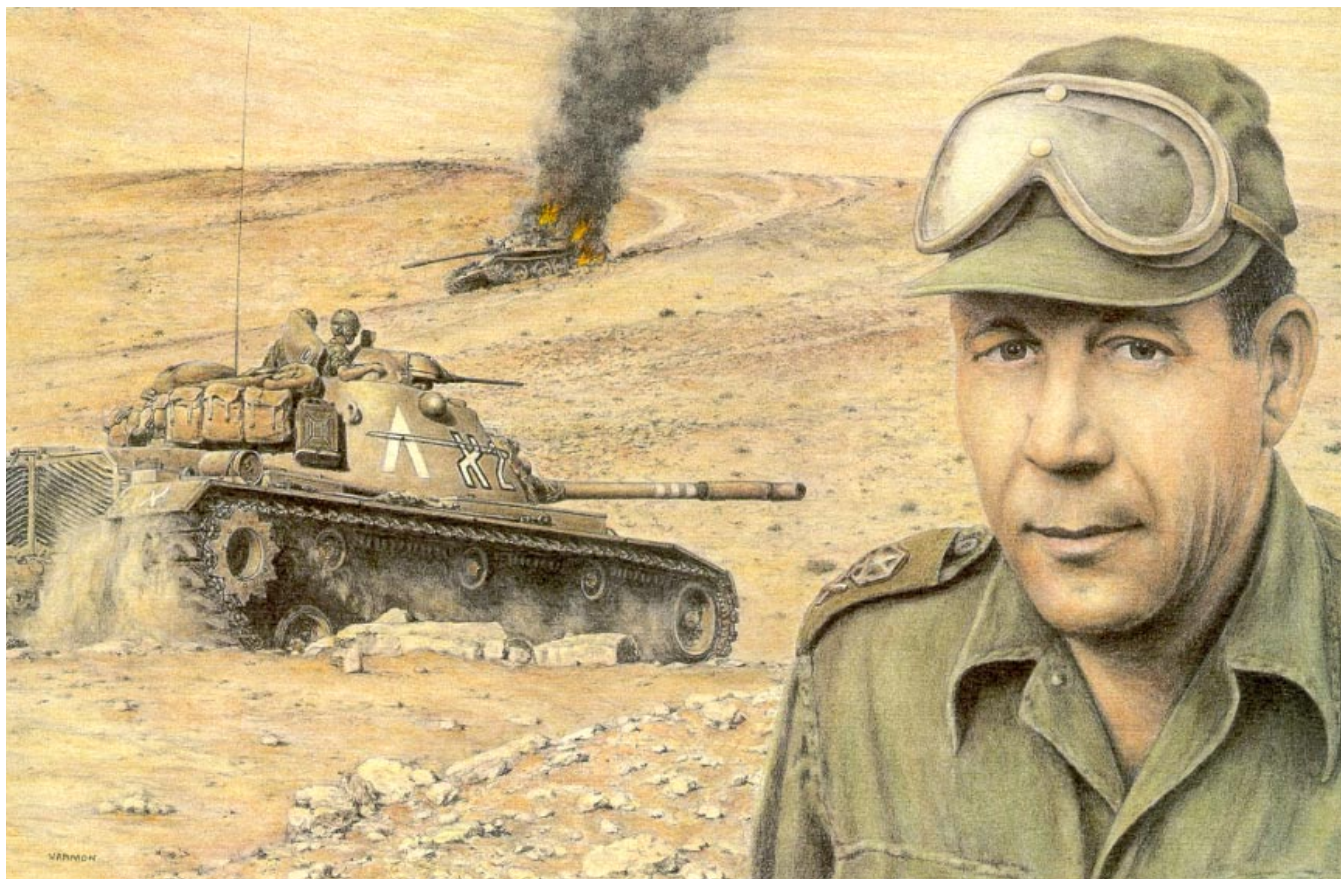
Had General Patton heard these words, surely he would have said — "L'audace, L'audace, L'audace!!"

Recently, on speaking of General Tal, General (Ret.) Donn Starry noted that:

"It need only be said in this regard that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find, in any armed force of any country in this century, a single officer who has had the dramatic influence on his country's armed forces doctrine, equipment, training and organization, that General Tal has had on Israel's Army and on that Army's dramatic success in battle."

And if these words were not enough, General (Ret.) Glenn Otis said it equally well when he said:

"TALIK is the only person I know in any country — including our own — of whom it can be said, he is the father of his nation's tank. TALIK is to the Israeli tank what Admiral Rickover was to the U.S. nuclear submarine. He is truly a man of his time."



He is also a tough taskmaster whose mind, once made up, is difficult to change. I remember accompanying him, over 25 years ago, on a visit to one of our tank fire control contractors in California. This particular contractor was pushing a wind sensor for our tanks at the time and was looking for the general's endorsement of the concept. General Tal would have none of it because, in his mind, a wind sensor only measured the wind and its direction **at the tank**, and not at the target or in between. When we went outside, we could see that the wind was blowing in one direction on the hillside about 1000 meters away. General Tal picked up some grass and threw it in the air and it blew in the opposite direction. "*See, I told you,*" he said.

The U.S. Army, and in particular its armored forces, owe General Tal a special debt. He and his commanders, for more than 30 years have opened their hearts and lessons learned to the U.S. Army and, in particular, to its armor officers. Candid, forthcoming, honest, holding no secrets, TALIK shared with our army his and his commanders' lifetime experience in battle, and from their experience, their sober, considered judgments about everything from combat vehicle design to strategy, tactics, training, and organization. Where in their judgment, they had made mis-

takes, what those mistakes had cost them in succeeding battles, and how they had changed quickly, adapting to early recognition of where they had gone wrong, they openly and freely shared. What they shared brought revision to M1 Tank and M2/M3 Infantry and Cavalry Fighting Vehicle requirements, along with key design changes.

The technical and operational help and advice given by TALIK and his colleagues after the 1973 Yom Kippur War was an invaluable assist in ensuring that the M1 and the M2/M3 would indeed be the best possible answer to their roles in meeting the threat of the future. Desert Storm is our proof of success.

At the Armor Center, their suggestions became the baseline for development of the U.S. Army's heavy force doctrine, including tactics and operational concepts, and other equipment requirements, organization, and training. As General Starry is quick to point out, it was his visits to Israel in the '70s and '80s, his walks on the Golan Heights, and his open and freewheeling exchanges with General Tal and his colleagues that gave birth to the Air-Land Battle concept and the winning doctrine of Desert Storm.

In these professional exchanges, and in the personal relationships that have

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grown over the years between the U.S. and Israeli armies, General Tal and his colleagues were always more forthcoming and supportive than were we. Inevitably what could be agreed upon became entangled by some element of the massive U.S. bureaucracy. But the important parts survived: doctrine, equipment performance requirements, organizational needs, training and education requirements, all drawn from the crucible of the Arab-Israeli Wars and from the dedication of the remarkable Armor leaders of the Israeli Defence Forces, headed by Israel Tal.

Our Israeli friends have provided a large and lasting contribution to the U.S. Army and its mounted force. The portrait entitled *TALIK*, and presented to General Tal by the Patton Museum Development Fund-Cavalry Armor Foundation and the U.S. Armor Association, is a recognition and "Thank You" for the many contributions he and Israel have made to our soldiers, their equipment, and their ability to fight and win as evidenced in Desert Storm.